

## **Section 9**

### **Public Involvement and Agency Coordination**

The Poplar Island Restoration Project has received steady and growing interest from the public and from agencies involved in natural resources management on the Chesapeake Bay from the initiation of the feasibility phase of the project in September 1994. For many years prior to the formal project initiation, island restoration was the topic of many discussions among interested citizens, members of the port community, and natural resource management agency personnel as well as in articles in magazines such as *Smithsonian*. The concept that evolved, with the strong support and guidance of the USFWS, was to restore valuable island habitat by placing material dredged from navigation channels in the Bay.

Following completion of a pre-feasibility report by the State in 1994, the Corps of Engineers, the Maryland Port Administration, and representatives of Chesapeake Bay-area natural resources management and port community agencies began formal coordination activities for the project. Preliminary actions included organization of an environmental working group and development of a public involvement program. The goal for both of these tasks was to provide public and agency representation during the preparation of the feasibility study.

#### **9.1 Purpose of Public Involvement and Agency Coordination**

Corps policy and guidance emphasizes that opportunities for public involvement must be provided during the planning stages of a project. In addition, Corps guidance supports many Federal regulations requiring close coordination among all levels of government and natural resource management agencies. In conformity with these aims, a public involvement program was developed early in the Poplar Island Feasibility Study to outline the program objectives, a tentative program schedule, and products desired from the program.

The objectives of the Poplar Island Feasibility Study public involvement and agency coordination program included the following:

- Gather valuable information about the potential project;
- Fulfill requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to inform the public and to inform decision makers;
- Provide effective coordination in order to prevent future project difficulties;
- Gain early support for the proposed actions as part of effective project management; and
- Explain expenditure of public monies to taxpayers.

The public involvement program was designed to provide opportunities for public participation during each planning stage. The study team was committed to conducting a public involvement

program that incorporated public input into the project planning process. Actions of the project team were based on the understanding that review of project plans after they are developed does not constitute a meaningful public involvement program. The study team was also committed to a public involvement process that would be integral to the project and could (and, in fact, did) require informal, extensive, and sometimes lengthy dialogue between the planners and the public.

## **9.2 Program Structure**

The major tasks in the public involvement program were divided into several stages, which fit into the general feasibility study schedule. The public involvement stages were identified as Project Initiation, Development of Alternative Plans, Development of Detailed Plans, and Conclusion of the Planning Study. Each stage of the public involvement program was defined by specific tasks that needed to be accomplished, appropriate forums for achieving those tasks, and products that were the desired result of the tasks completed.

### **Stage 1 - Project Initiation**

The first stage of the public involvement and agency coordination program was designed to be exploratory and comprehensive with regard to the identification of public and agency concerns. During this stage, program activities were directed toward ensuring that a wide variety of viewpoints were expressed so that they could be considered during the planning process. The task of the public involvement program at this stage was to identify as many potential issues, opportunities, problems, and constraints as possible. Forums for accomplishing these tasks were agency coordination meetings, informal interest group meetings, and public scoping workshops.

Meetings in the project initiation stage furnished an opportunity to give information to the public, gather information from a multitude of sources, discuss the potential project, and brainstorm ideas, issues, and concerns. A video of the Poplar Island project, which emphasized the Corps/MPA partnership responsible for the project, was prepared by the MPA and shown during the project initiation stage. Printed information about the study was available, including a Public Notice mailed to agencies, organizations, and individuals; a Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register; meeting handouts; brochures; and news articles. At each public meeting during the feasibility study, comment cards were distributed, encouraging people to express their opinions, make comments, or ask questions.

The number of participants in the earliest days of the project was limited to those identified by the project team. These participants included a number of people and organizations who had been involved with the project during preparation of the pre-feasibility study or who were aware of the project and interested in being involved in the planning process. The group played an important role throughout the feasibility study and is expected to maintain some level of involvement through project completion. In general, several different public(s) participated, to some degree, during the first stage of the public involvement program. These publics included coordinating agencies, which were strongly and consistently involved; participating members of the general public, such as citizen

who read or heard about the project, but were not otherwise involved. As expected, the number of participants in the Poplar Island public involvement program grew as the project progressed and as interested individuals and groups were identified.

Representatives of approximately a dozen agencies attended the initial kick-off meeting at the Corps of Engineers offices in December 1994. In addition to natural resource management agencies, representatives of the Talbot County Department of Public Works, Maryland Department of Transportation, and Rukert Terminals attended. In early 1995, informal meetings were also held with members of the Maryland Charterboat Association, the Talbot County Council, and a group of Tilghman-area watermen.

Public scoping workshops were held in February 1995 at Tilghman Island, on the eastern shore of the Bay, and at Chesapeake Beach on the western shore. The public workshops were advertised in local newspapers and announced by flyers mailed and posted in the area. Two meetings at which identical information was presented were held to provide equal access to information about the project to the interested public on both sides of the Bay.

The desired product of this stage of the study was information about the project, project area, and public perceptions. Preliminary information about the proposed project was provided by the study team to the public, and citizens and agencies responded with information about their ideas and concerns. The product of this exchange of information provided valuable input into the formulation of alternative plans during later phases of the project.

Several Tilghman-area watermen attended the public scoping workshop and expressed concern regarding impacts to the local fishery. Three informal meetings were held in the following weeks in order to discuss those concerns. Meetings with the watermen were attended by members of the study team, including representatives from the Corps, the MPA, USFWS, NMFS, and NOAA. The product of the meetings was a set of charts marked with the valuable fishery areas near Poplar Island, both open and closed to commercial fishing, as identified by the watermen. As a result of these meetings, the study team met with the Governor's Tidal Fish Commission Advisory Committee to request replacement areas to offset the loss of fishery due to project construction. The Commission agreed to forward a recommendation to the DNR to open several closed fishing areas.

## Stage 2 - Development of Alternatives

Activities during the development of alternatives shifted from the exchange of more general information about the project background and the ideas, values, and concerns of the public to more specific topics. The second public meeting, held on 12 April 1995, included a presentation of several draft alternative plans. Meeting attendees were requested to comment on those alternatives. Several weeks prior to the public meeting, a news release, newspaper advertisements, and flyers mailed to those on the mailing list announced the meeting and invited the public to attend. The meeting was held at the Tilghman Elementary School. As a result of the low attendance at the February scoping meeting held on the western shore, a Stage 2 meeting was not planned for the western shore of the Bay. However, in response to a specific request by a small group of

Chesapeake Beach-area residents, several project team members presented the alternative plans at an informal meeting on 19 April.

During the alternatives development, the Working Group of the DNPOP used an iterative process to evaluate the benefits and impacts of each alternative and to select the preferred plan. The alternative selected encompassed 1,110 acres, with half developed as wetland habitat and half as upland habitat.

### Stage 3 - Development of Detailed Plans

Stage 3 public involvement activities provided opportunities for the evaluation and modification of the selected alternative. During this stage, the project team and the public again assessed the impacts of the plan and considered ways to fine-tune the design to maximize benefits and minimize negative impacts. A public meeting was held on 23 August 1995, at Tilghman Elementary School to present the selected alternative to the public. Several weeks prior to the meeting, news releases and advertisements were published, and flyers announcing the meeting were mailed. In addition to addresses on the project mailing list, flyers were sent to approximately 1,500 watermen in the 3 counties closest to the project area.

### Stage 4 - Conclusion of Planning Study

The objective of Stage 4 was to present the selected plan to the public. The Poplar Island draft Feasibility Study and EIS was provided for a 30-day public review on 13 November 1995. During the public review period, a public hearing was held to present the proposed project and to allow the public to make statements and ask questions regarding the project, which were recorded. The public hearing was held on 28 November 1995, at the Talbot County Free Library, in Easton, Maryland. A formal public hearing format was followed, with an assistant to the District Engineer officiating and approximately a dozen citizens attending. It is assumed that the small number of attendees was a result of the extensive and successful public involvement activities accomplished throughout the preceding months of the study. A short discussion period, with appropriate project team members responding to audience questions and comments, followed the formal presentation. The closure of government offices due to emergency winter weather conditions and government furloughs, as well as requests from several agencies, resulted in an extension of the review and comment period.

## **9.3 Relationship to Planning Process**

Stages and tasks of the public involvement program were designed to coincide with study phases so that products of the program could be integrated into the planning process in a meaningful way. In addition to providing information on the project status, the project team gained information from the public. Preliminary public involvement activities also introduced the project team, the proposed project, and the public involvement process to the public, and began an interaction among the project players that was critical in building and maintaining support for the project. At each stage of the

feasibility study, information gained during earlier public involvement activities was provided to the project team and incorporated into the project design.

#### **9.4 Participation and Support**

Prior to the initiation of the Poplar Island Restoration Feasibility Study, the project already had acquired a number of supporters and participants. The topic of island restoration had been discussed among environmentalists, recreationists, politicians, Bay-area natural resource managers, the port community, and others over a period of 25 years. Articles had appeared in newspapers and magazines, and natural resource management agencies had prepared conceptual designs for a habitat restoration project on the island. In 1994, the Maryland Port Administration prepared a pre-feasibility report outlining a project using dredged material placed within dikes to create a land area at the approximate size and location of the historic Poplar Island. Soon after completion of the pre-feasibility report, the Corps' Baltimore District joined the MPA as a project partner.

Early in the feasibility phase of the project, a meeting was held to discuss the project and associated environmental issues. A variety of agencies were represented at the meeting, setting the tone for the broadly supported and collaboratively developed project that was eventually produced. Attendees included representatives of natural resources management agencies and the port community. Agencies represented included NMFS, DNR, NOAA, USFWS, MES, MPA, MDE, EPA, and the Chesapeake Bay Program, as well as others in the port community. An Environmental Working Group was formed to provide guidance from an environmental perspective on issues such as project design and operation, habitat development, and monitoring of existing conditions and environmental impacts. The Working Group was comprised of representatives of natural resource management agencies, rather than commercial port community organizations.

Regular Working Group meetings were held throughout the feasibility study. In addition to the full Working Group, smaller sub-groups also met as needed to explore specific issues, such as development of a post-construction monitoring plan, or to provide guidance on habitat development.

##### **9.4.1 Official Support**

In addition to the regular coordination with and participation by agencies, organizations, and the public, government officials have strongly supported the project. On 14 April 1994, the Maryland Congressional delegation wrote to President Clinton seeking assistance in implementing beneficial-use projects, including the Poplar Island restoration project. The President responded on 13 June 1994, with support for the use of the Section 204 program. On 14 July 1994, Maryland Senator Paul S. Sarbanes wrote the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA[CW]) requesting his assistance in implementation of a project at Poplar Island. A letter on 10 May 1995 from Senator Sarbanes to ASA(CW) again requested support. On 7 September 1995, Senator Sarbanes and Senator Barbara A. Mikulski wrote the President, specifically requesting assistance in acquiring project funding. A similar letter was forwarded from Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening to the President on 15 September 1995. A final letter of official support was sent by Mary Roe

Walkup, Maryland House of Delegates, to the Chief of Planning, Baltimore District, on 6 December 1995. These officials and members of their staffs have been involved in the entire planning process for this project. The Easton, Maryland, District Field Representative for Congressman Wayne T. Gilchrest attended a number of informal coordination meetings and public workshops. Copies of official correspondence are included in Annex C.

#### **9.4.2 Public**

The public involved with the Poplar Island study included a diverse group of organizations and individuals, ranging from large government agencies to retired couples living near the Bay. The diversity of participants was expressed by differences in their degrees and types of involvement with the project as well as differences in their backgrounds and perspectives; however, in general, participants belonged to several identifiable groups. A core group of agency representatives was involved early in the feasibility study and is expected to maintain an active role throughout the life of the project. This group is part of an ongoing collaborative process with the project team. A second group may be considered to be those agencies and organizations, such as local governments and commercial and recreational fishing interests, who are intermittently active in the public involvement program at times when their concerns and interests become issues in the study. A third group was composed of interested citizens who followed the study progress by attending public workshops, keeping informed about the project status, and making comments. Still another group, typically part of any public involvement program, might be defined as individuals who followed news of the project, but did not attend meetings or take an active part in other aspects of the public involvement process, and those individuals who did not take part in public involvement activities or demonstrate interest in the project, but who might, nevertheless, be affected by it.

The intent of the public involvement program was to identify each potential group or participant; to encourage constructive interaction between the group and the project team; to elicit the ideas, issues, and concerns important to each group; and to incorporate those ideas, issues, and concerns into the planning process.

Comments made during the study reflected a wide range of values, issues, and concerns including broad environmental issues, technical construction questions, and personal feelings about the island and the proposed project. Public perceptions expressed during the scoping process included an appreciation of the fishery and recreation resources, and the aesthetics and history of the island. Other comments during the study focused on the construction of the project: the cost, stability, potential for pollution, and impacts to fisheries. In general, the public expressed strong support for a project that protected the mainland and Poplar Harbor, created wildlife habitat, provided recreation and commercial fishing benefits, and maintained the island as a nature preserve with limited access.

#### **9.4.3 Agency Coordination and Support**

Strong and consistent agency coordination and support was a hallmark of the Poplar Island project. Agency participation was important in developing early conceptual plans for the island restoration and agencies will continue to play an active role through the feasibility study, project design, and

implementation process. Agency coordination activities ranged from formal written communication among agencies to assistance with presentations and participation at public meetings and workshops. Formal communications included correspondence with the SHPO for cultural resources; with state and Federal agencies for monitoring concerns; with MDE for water quality issues; with USFWS and NMFS for threatened and endangered species; with DNR, NBS, NMFS, and USFWS for information on biological resources; and with the EPA for NEPA compliance. The involvement of a number of sponsors, contractors, and agencies in the collaborative approach to development of the project required sharing coordination letters and other communications as appropriate. For this reason, letters were often sent to one participant and forwarded to others. Extensive informal coordination also took place as natural resource management agencies participated in Environmental Working Group meetings, as questions were raised and answered during phone conversations, and in impromptu discussions as working group members met during normal work activities.

In addition to formal and informal coordination correspondence, review and comment activities, and other communication, a number of formal letters expressing agency support for the project were received by the Baltimore District. Copies of the support and comment letters as well as pertinent memoranda are included in Annex C. Following is a summary of key agency and official correspondence and the response or resolution of any issues raised.

<u>16 September 1994</u>	Letter from EPA to MES regarding NEPA compliance for Poplar Island Habitat Restoration Project.
Response/Action:	Based on considerations including those outlined in the letter from EPA, a decision was made to prepare an EIS for the project.
<u>21 October 1994</u>	Letter from Paul Slunt at MDE to USACE regarding scope of work for environmental sampling to be documented for the study.
Response/Action:	In response to this and a number of similar comments, a monitoring sub-group of the Environmental Working Group that met throughout the feasibility study to define the purposes, methods, and other details of the monitoring program.
<u>25 October 1994</u>	Phone conversation record for call from NMFS to USACE regarding environmental testing/sampling.
Response/Action:	These and similar issues were resolved by the monitoring sub-group.
<u>26 October 1994</u>	Letter from NMFS to MES regarding environmental sampling .
Response/Action:	This and similar issues were resolved by the monitoring sub-group.
<u>27 October 1994</u>	Memorandum from Cece Donovan/MES to Robert Smith/MES commenting on environmental scoping for the project.
Response/Action:	This and similar issues were resolved by the monitoring sub-group.
<u>1 November 1994</u>	Memorandum from DNR to MES regarding reclassification of Natural Oyster Bar 8-10, which is adjacent to the proposed alignment for the restored

island. The re-classification had been requested by the project team in order to reduce the design constraints on the project development.

Response/Action: The result of the DNR's determination to not pursue the re-classification of NOB 8-10 was to maintain the original (pre-feasibility) project alignment in that area.

8 November 1994 Letter from NMFS to MES regarding minimum environmental sampling.

Response/Action: This and similar issues were resolved by the monitoring sub-group.

16 November 1994 Phone conversation record for calls between MES and USACE regarding environmental testing.

Response/Action: This and similar issues were resolved by the monitoring sub-group.

(The following four letters were prepared by the environmental contractor, EA Engineering, to respond to comments made by various agencies on environmental testing for the project.)

23 November 1994 Letter from EA Engineering to USACE addressing comments on environmental sampling in 21 October letter from Paul Slunt of MDE.

28 November 1994 Letter from EA Engineering to USACE addressing comments in 27 October memo from Cece Donovan on environmental sampling.

5 January 1994 Letter from EA Engineering to USACE addressing comments on environmental sampling in 26 October NMFS letter.

6 January 1994 Letter from EA Engineering to USACE addressing comments on environmental sampling in 8 November letter from NMFS.

18 January 1995 Coordination letter from USACE to Congressional representatives. Identical letters were sent to Senators Barbara Mikulski and Paul S. Sarbanes, and Representatives Benjamin L. Cardin, Robert L. Ehrlich, Wayne T. Gilchrest, and Kweisi Mfume.

18 January 1995 Coordination letter from USACE to natural resource management agencies. Copies of the letter were sent to USFWS, U.S. Coast Guard, CBP, EPA, MDE, DNR, Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas Commission, Maryland Geological Survey, Talbot County Council, Maryland Waterman's Association, Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association, Chesapeake Audubon Society, Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), NMFS, NOAA, and the Maryland Wetlands Committee.

18 January 1995 Letter from USACE to MPA regarding decision to prepare EIS.



<u>19 January 1995</u>	Public Notice prepared by USACE and distributed to approximately 200 agencies, organizations, and individuals.
<u>20 January 1995</u>	Cover letters from MES to NMFS sent with contractor responses to environmental testing comments in NMFS letter of 26 October and 8 November.
<u>3 February 1995</u>	Letter from National Biological Survey to USACE regarding an offer of technical expertise on water birds at Poplar Island.
Response/Action:	Dr. Michael Erwin, migratory bird expert at Patuxent Environmental Science Center and writer of the letter, subsequently became a member of the Environmental Working Group.
<u>6 February 1995</u>	Memorandum for the Record regarding January 30 meeting with SHPO to discuss the results of the Phase I investigation and define Phase II tasks.
<u>7 February 1995</u>	Letter from Maryland Historical Trust to USACE regarding cultural resources investigations at Poplar Island.
<u>8 February 1995</u>	Notice of Intent, appeared in Federal Register.
<u>14 February 1995</u>	Memorandum from cultural contractor, Goodwin and Associates, to project design contractors providing an update on Phase I and Phase II investigations at the project site.
<u>16 February 1995</u>	Letter from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to environmental contractor responding to request for information on endangered species and fish and wildlife resources in the project area, in accordance with the Endangered Species Act and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.
Response/Action:	Information was incorporated into the study document.
<u>17 February 1995</u>	Letter from Chesapeake Bay Foundation to USACE regarding CBF support for the project.
<u>17 March 1995</u>	Memorandum for the Record documenting results of meeting among representatives of USACE, MES, MPA, and contractors regarding cultural resources investigations tasks.
<u>5 April 1995</u>	Letter from NMFS to USACE regarding locations of fisheries in project area.
Response/Action:	Information from NMFS as well as information from Tilghman-area watermen was incorporated into the design of the project.
<u>5 April 1995</u>	Letter from Ms. Nancy Butkowski at DNR to USACE regarding potential spawning areas for horseshoe crabs and terrapins in the project area.
Response/Action:	The potential for horseshoe crab habitat in the project area has been noted. Environmental monitoring on Poplar Island did not indicate use for spawning

by horseshoe crabs or terrapins; however, some indications of use on Coaches Island were found. It is expected that a wetland plant nursery area approximately 10 acres in size and located between Coaches Island and the eastern dike will provide beaches for use by crabs and terrapins.

<u>21 June 1995</u>	Letter from contractor (Goodwin and Associates) regarding schedule of cultural investigations in project area.
<u>19 July 1995</u>	Letter from Mr. Robert L. Miller at Maryland DNR to environmental contractor providing information on threatened and endangered species and critical habitats in the Poplar Island area.
Response/Action:	Information was included in study document.
<u>27 July 1995</u>	Letter from MES to Maryland Watermen's Association regarding coordination with watermen on support for project. Although the project was strongly supported by watermen in general, informal meetings with Tilghman-area watermen had identified the loss of fishing areas as an important negative impact.
Response/Action:	Members of the project team met with the Tidal Fish Commission on 15 August to request that the Commission recommend opening fishery areas that were currently closed to replace those lost to the project. The Commission agreed to make the recommendation to the DNR, with the caveat that watermen respect the marked boundaries.
<u>8 August 1995</u>	Letter from NOAA to environmental contractor providing information on endangered species and fishery and habitat resources.
Response/Action:	Information was incorporated into the study document.
<u>23 August 1995</u>	Letter from USFWS to environmental contractor responding to a request for information on natural resources within the project area, in accordance with the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
Response/Action:	Information was incorporated into the study document.
<u>1 September 1995</u>	Memorandum from MES to Members of Environmental working group requesting agency concurrence on monitoring plan.
<u>7 September 1995</u>	Letter from Senators Mikulski and Sarbanes to President Clinton supporting the project and urging the President to make Poplar Island a national priority.
<u>14 September 1995</u>	Letter from NMFS to MES regarding comments on the draft Habitat Development Report for the project.
Response/Action:	These and similar comments were discussed at Environmental Working Group and habitat sub-group meetings and incorporated into the project design as appropriate.

<u>15 September 1995</u>	Letter from Governor Glendening to President Clinton supporting the project and urging Federal funding support.
<u>25 September 1995</u>	Executive Summary Letter from contractor (Goodwin and Associates) to Joint Venture discussing findings at Poplar Island.
<u>3 October 1995</u>	Letter from Maryland Historical Trust to USACE with discussion of draft Phase I Terrestrial and Marine Archeological Surveys for the project and Phase II Investigation for several sites.
<u>27 November 1995</u>	Letter from MES to USACE providing phone conversation notes from discussion between Cece Donovan and EPA Region III reviewers.
Response/Action:	Representatives of EPA resumed attendance at working group meetings; in addition, several discussions and meetings were held among USACE, CBP, EPA, and other project team members to clarify and resolve issues.
<u>5 December 1995</u>	Letter of support from commercial marina at Knapp's Narrows, at Tilghman, Maryland.
<u>6 December 1995</u>	Letter of support for project from Mary Roe Walkup, Maryland House of Delegates.
<u>12 December 1995</u>	Letter from U.S. Department of the Interior requesting an extension of the draft report review and comment period to February 9, 1996.
Response/Action:	The review and comment period was extended.
<u>14 December 1995</u>	Letter of support for project from U.S Fish and Wildlife Service.
<u>18 December 1995</u>	Letter of support for project from National Biological Service/Patuxent Environmental Science Center.
<u>21 December 1995</u>	Letter of support from Maryland Department of the Environment.
<u>28 December 1995</u>	Letter from Maryland DNR to Baltimore District providing agency comments.
Response/Action:	Comments were incorporated into the final document and addressed in a reply letter.
<u>3 January 1996</u>	Agency comments received from Maryland Department of the Environment.
Response/Action:	Comments were addressed in working group meeting, in personal conversation, in final document, and in letter reply to agency.
<u>3 January 1996</u>	Letter of support from Maryland Department of Natural Resources.
<u>16 January 1996</u>	Letter of support from the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay.

<u>17 January 1996</u>	Letter from EPA requesting an extension of comment and review period to 2 February.
Response/Action:	Review and comment period was extended; EPA draft comments were discussed at meeting among representatives of Corps, MPA, MES, FWS, and EPA on 25 January 1996.
<u>18 January 1996</u>	Agency comments received from Maryland Geological Survey.
Response/Action:	Comments were addressed in final document and in reply letter.
<u>22 January 1996</u>	Letter from NOAA/NMFS providing agency comments on draft document.
Response/Action:	Comments were addressed in final study document and in a reply letter.
<u>23 January 1996</u>	Letter of agency support for project from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
<u>26 January 1996</u>	Letter from the Maryland DNR to Baltimore District providing additional agency comments.
Response/Action:	Comments were addressed in final study document and in reply letter.
<u>30 January 1996</u>	Letter from U.S. Department of the Interior to Baltimore District providing FWS comments in accordance with Section 2(b) of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.
Response/Action:	Comments were addressed in personal communication, in the final study document, and in a reply letter.
<u>30 January 1996</u>	Letter from the Maryland Oyster Recovery Partnership suggesting intertidal oyster reef development at the Poplar Island project.
Response/Action:	Comment will be discussed by the Environmental Working Group and addressed in Habitat Restoration Plan.
<u>31 January 1996</u>	Letter from the Maryland Department of the Environment to the Baltimore District stating that the project will comply with the Department's air quality regulations.
<u>1 February 1996</u>	Letter from Maryland Department of the Environment in support of the project and stating that the project is consistent with the State's Coastal Zone Management Program.
<u>2 February 1996</u>	Letter from EPA Region III providing comments on the draft EIS.
Response/Action:	Draft comments were discussed during a 25 January 1996 meeting with the EPA, Corps, MES, and environmental contractor; in a reply letter; and incorporated into the final document.

## **9.5 Chronology of Activities**

### January - February 1995

A draft Public Involvement program was developed and presented to the MPA, MES, and contractors early in the feasibility study. The draft program outlined the program purposes, stages, activities, and specific tasks; a draft schedule of activities; and the products desired from each task or activity. Initial public involvement activities included preparation of an agency coordination letter, a Congressional coordination letter, a Public Notice, and a Notice of Intent. In addition, news releases were provided to newspapers in the project area and flyers announcing the first public workshop were sent to addresses on the mailing list.

Although informal meetings were held throughout the feasibility study, a number of meetings were concentrated in the weeks prior to the first public workshop in February 1995. The purpose of these informal meetings was to initiate contacts early in the public involvement process with groups or organizations having a clear interest in the study.

### 21 and 23 February 1995

The first public workshops/scoping meetings were held on 21 and 23 February 1995. Two public scoping meetings were held in order to provide identical information to the interested publics on both sides of the Bay. Meeting presentations introduced the public involvement process and described the potential project.

### 12 April 1995

During Stage 2 of the public involvement program, the second public workshop/information meeting was held to present and discuss the development of alternative plans. Several weeks prior to the meeting date, news releases, newspaper advertisements, and flyers announced the meeting.

### 23 August 1995

The project plan selected by the project team and the Environmental Working Group was presented at the Stage 3 public information meeting. Several weeks before the meeting, advertisements, news releases, and mailed flyers invited the public to attend.

### 29 November 1995

A fourth and final public meeting was held during the public review period. The meeting format was a formal public hearing in compliance with NEPA requirements. The draft feasibility study and EIS were presented at the hearing. The recommended plan was presented and meeting attendees invited to discuss the information provided, ask questions, and comment on any and all aspects of the project. The small number of meeting attendees appeared to be familiar with and supportive of the project. In general, questions and comments following the presentation requested clarification or expansion of the information presented. Statements made at the hearing, as well as comments received during the EIS public review period, have been incorporated into the study documents.

After study completion, additional public involvement activities may include final news releases or other public information opportunities, as appropriate.

## **9.6 Public Involvement Activities and Results**

A draft Public Involvement Program was outlined early in the feasibility study. The draft program included general descriptions of public involvement activities, such as "informal meetings with interest groups," rather than identification of specific groups or tasks. As appropriate groups and tasks were identified, the program was modified to include specific information. A Public Involvement Program outline and schedule is included in Annex C.

The public involvement activities were designed to introduce the project and the project team to the general public and interest groups, and to facilitate coordination with agencies; to elicit ideas, comments, and concerns that could be used to help shape the planning process; and to inform the public of the project status on a regular basis.

### **9.6.1 Informal Meetings**

The earliest interaction between the project team and the public took place during informal meetings that were held with several interest groups. These meetings provided an opportunity to present the potential project to groups with particular interests in the project or project area. Informal meetings were held with the Maryland Charterboat Captains (7 February 1995), Talbot County Council (14 February and 13 June 1995), the Chesapeake Bay Alliance Critical Areas Commission (1 March 1995), and the Governor's Tidal Fish Commission Advisory Board (15 August 1995). Initial contact with a group of Eastern Shore watermen was made during the first public workshop/scoping meeting. Subsequent meetings with several Tilghman Island watermen were held during March and April. Meetings with the Tilghman-area watermen provided an opportunity to discuss the potential impacts of the project on the area fishery and on the watermen who fish there.

### **9.6.2 Scoping Meetings**

The purposes of the first public workshop or scoping meeting were to introduce the project to the public; to begin preparing the public and the project team for further interaction; to identify the values, issues, and concerns of the interested public regarding the proposed project; and to identify potential environmental impacts. After a presentation on the pre-feasibility plan and the project status, scoping meeting attendees were asked to identify the good and bad things about Poplar Island as it exists and about the potential project, and to describe their ideas of a "perfect" Poplar Island. The responses of individuals on those topics produced a range of ideas and concerns from the loss of an important fishery to the possibility that the dike design as presented was inadequate to protect the restored island from storm damage. An informal poll identified the issues most important to the attendees and helped prioritize the issues. Issues identified as most important to the scoping meeting attendees included erosion causes and protection, impacts to the fishery, wildlife habitat, the project cost, and construction considerations. An open discussion period, allowing many of the comments and issues to be explored by the group, followed. Each of the ideas and comments was incorporated into the project, either through discussion with the project team, modification of the project design,

or inclusion in the environmental documentation. A list of the comments made at the public workshops and on comment cards is in Annex C.

The original public involvement plan proposed that two meetings, identical in format and information presented, would be held at each stage of the public involvement process. The intent was to provide the same information to the publics located on each side of the Bay. Based on that plan, two scoping workshops were held, one at Tilghman Island on 21 February and the other at Chesapeake Beach on 23 February 1995. However, low attendance at the Chesapeake Beach scoping meeting, as well as low attendance at the second public information meeting held in April at the Chesapeake Beach location, led to the discontinuance of meetings on the western shore.

### **9.6.3 Public Information Meetings**

As part of Stage 2 (Development of Alternative Plans) and Stage 3 (Development of Detailed Plans) public involvement activities, public information workshops were held at Tilghman Elementary School on 12 April and 23 August 1995. The 12 April meeting presented several alternative designs for public review and comment. Information/comments received at the meeting were integrated into the selection of the alternative project design which was then further developed by the project team. The selected and refined plan alternative was later presented at the August public information meeting. As part of the iterative review/comment/modify public involvement and design process, comments made at the August public information meeting were also incorporated into the project design.

### **9.7 Public Hearing**

The final public meeting of the public involvement process was a public hearing on 28 November 1995. The meeting was held at the Talbot County Free Library in Easton, Maryland. The location was selected to provide a larger meeting room than that available on Tilghman Island, where earlier meetings were held. The meeting format was a formal public hearing, with an assistant to the District Engineer officiating. Statements made at the hearing were incorporated into the EIS and the planning process as a whole.

### **9.8 Communication With Public**

Communication between the project team and the public was accomplished through informational meetings and handouts, news releases and articles, flyers, comment cards and letters, phone calls, and electronic mail. Attendees at public meetings were encouraged to express their opinions or ask questions at any time during the meeting proper or during the open discussion period, after the meeting in conversations with team members, or through mail or telephone communication. Discussions during public meetings were generally highly interactive and constructive. The project team included appropriate technical staff at public meetings so that relevant topics could be addressed and questions answered promptly. A number of comment cards were returned to the District office; several letters and e-mail messages were also received. Comments and discussions were generally constructive, with the majority supporting the project. Several of the mailed

answering questions during meetings, by written communication, or in phone conversations. In addition, comments made at public meetings were provided to and discussed at the monthly project team meetings. Comments, letters, and other communications from the public are included in Annex C.

## **9.9 Agency Coordination**

Extensive agency coordination was a critical element in the completion of the Poplar Island feasibility study. The USFWS and other natural resource management agencies provided early support and guidance for the concept of beneficial use of dredged material to restore the island. The agencies continued to support the project through completion of the pre-feasibility study by the MPA and preparation of the feasibility study by the Corps. Through the Environmental Working Group, the natural resource management agencies played a key role in the design of project alternatives, selection of the recommended project alignment, various project modifications, development of the habitat plan, and preparation of a monitoring framework to identify existing environmental conditions and to monitor the project area during and after construction. The Working Group met on a monthly basis, with additional meetings for sub-groups responsible for areas of particular concern or complexity, such as development of the monitoring framework and review of the habitat development plan. Natural resource agency representatives also participated in the public workshops and meetings as attendees, technical experts, or presenters.

Members of the Working Group included representatives of the USFWS, EPA, NMFS, NOAA, NBS, MDE, MPA, DNR, MES, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, as well as representatives from the Corps' Operations and Navigation and Planning offices. Meeting locations were rotated among the Corps' District office and the offices of MES, FWS, DNR, and MPA. In some cases, one agency was represented by several individuals, each providing technical expertise in a different area. For example, group members from NMFS/NOAA included scientists and technical experts from the Beaufort, South Carolina, office, from the Research Facility at Oxford, Maryland, and from the Silver Spring and Annapolis offices. The resulting depth of technical expertise on the Environmental Working Group provided a sound scientific basis for island construction, environmental monitoring, and habitat design decisions.

## **9.10 Press Coverage**

Articles on the Poplar Island restoration have appeared in various publications for many years. The island's long history of human habitation, its importance to waterfowl, and its attractiveness to recreationists have been a focus of public interest. In addition, the steady erosion, fragmentation, and virtual disappearance of the island has created recent flurries of interest in the press. Two articles, presenting opposing arguments in the debate about restoring the island, appeared as early as 1971 in *Smithsonian* magazine. More recently, articles about the proposed project have appeared in daily papers on the Eastern Shore, in Baltimore, and in Washington D.C. Regional papers and other periodicals such as the *Chesapeake Bay Program* and the *Maryland Waterman's Gazette* have also carried stories about the project. Copies of a number of articles are in Annex C.



## 9.11 Summary

Poplar Island has been in the public eye for many years, and the idea of restoring the island has been discussed by various agencies and interest groups. Over the past decade, a concept evolved to beneficially use clean material dredged from Chesapeake Bay navigation channels to restore the island for wildlife habitat. A number of natural resource management agencies, as well as the port community have supported this concept. A 1994 pre-feasibility study based on this concept was prepared by MPA. The Corps became a project sponsor in 1994 and began preparing this Poplar Island Feasibility Study and EIS.

As part of the EIS, and in compliance with NEPA requirements, a public involvement and agency coordination plan were developed for the project. The purpose of these activities was to provide information to the public and to decision-makers. The project has been and will continue to be extensively coordinated with concerned Federal, state, regional, and local agencies. The focus of environmental coordination is to ensure that environmental factors are considered along with economic and engineering factors. Representatives from the Corps, EPA, NMFS, USFWS, NBS, DNR, MDE, MPA, MES and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation have worked together to plan the restoration of Poplar Island. Development of the plans for construction of the perimeter dikes, placement of the material, development of wildlife habitat, monitoring of the project, and management of the completed project was and will continue to be a collaborative effort among these groups, with environmental benefits as a primary goal.

In accordance with Corps policy and guidance, a comprehensive public involvement and agency coordination program was developed for the Poplar Island Project. Interested and affected individuals, groups, and agencies were provided opportunities to participate in the process of developing the proposed island restoration plan. Informal meetings with special interest groups (including several meetings to discuss fishery impacts with Tilghman-area watermen), public workshops and informational meetings, flyers, newspaper advertisements, news releases, and articles were used to provide information about the project. During each stage of the public information and agency coordination process, information was presented to the public and to agencies, review and comments were requested, and the feedback received was incorporated into the study.